



F-35 Lightning II Program

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JOTT conducts F-35 pre-IOT&E cold weather testing at Eielson

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EIELSON AIR FORCE BASE, Alaska

-- In April 2016, the Air Force made an announcement that would change Eielson AFB history. After a lengthy analysis of the installation's operations, environmental factors and cost, the Secretary of the Air Force selected Eielson AFB to be the first operational USAF location outside the contiguous United States to receive the F-35A Lightning II.

In preparation for the arrival of the Department of Defense's newest fifth-generation fighter, the installation has seen growth and changes. At the same time the Joint Strike Fighter Operational Test Team (JOTT) recently completed testing to determine whether all three variants of the F-35 are suitable and able to operate in the frigid weather of interior Alaska.

There is no question the F-35, which already completed developmental-testing in sub-zero temperatures, will be coming to Alaska in 2020.

"The decision to station the F-35 here has been established," said Robert Behler, Director, Operational Test & Evaluation Office of the Secretary of Defense. "We're not trying to prove or disprove anything. We're just trying to make sure this weapon system has the operational capability it needs to function in this environment."

Due to its location, Eielson will be one of the harshest environments in which the aircraft will be stationed. It also makes it an ideal location for testing the F-35 in a cold weather environment for this pre-Initial Operational Testing & Evaluation (IOT&E) test event. The F-35 IOT&E, which is scheduled to formally start in the fall of 2018, will inform the warfighter and Congress on the aircraft's overall effectiveness to conduct designed missions and the suitability of the weapon system. Additional pre-IOT&E test events will be permitted in coming months, before all necessary test readiness entrance criteria for the formal start of IOT&E are met in the fall of 2018. These additional events include mission scenarios for strike coordination and reconnaissance, aerial reconnaissance and close air support, along with weapons testing.

"We're here at Eielson to prove the capability of the aircraft to operate under extreme conditions of cold weather," said Behler, a former experimental test pilot who flew more than 65 aircraft types. "Being here and showing the aircraft's ability to operate in this environment will tell a lot of people we have a credible weapon system."

"It is a requirement of this weapon system to be able to operate in cold weather conditions," said Maj. Gen. Matthew Molloy, the Air Force Operational Testing and Evaluation Center commander. "We are up here characterizing what that performance looks like and we will feed this information to not only decision makers, but also to the warfighter."



Two U.S. Navy, F-35C Lightning II, 5th-generation fighters sit on the flight line during pre-initial Operational Testing and Evaluation Jan. 23, 2018, at Eielson Air Force Base, Alaska. All three variants of the F-35 were brought to Eielson to test and evaluate their ability to operate in an extreme cold-weather environment. (U.S. Air Force photo by Airman 1st Class Isaac Johnson)



A U.S. Air Force F-35A Lightning II sits on the flight line during pre-Initial Operational Testing and Evaluation on Jan. 23, 2018, at Eielson Air Force Base, Alaska. All three variants of the F-35 were brought to Eielson to test their ability to operate in an extreme cold-weather environment. (U.S. Air Force photo by Airman 1st Class Isaac Johnson)

Although the decision to base the F-35s at Eielson was made more than a year ago, the continued testing of the aircraft will ensure the DOD is delivering the most capable aircraft to the joint force.

“The whole objective of operational test and evaluation is to deliver a weapon system for our warriors that’s combat credible,” said Behler.

By combining Eielson’s advantageous location with the Joint Strike Fighter, the Icemen team will continue to provide stability in the Indo-Asia Pacific region for decades to come.



A U.S. Air Force F-35A Lightning II takes off during pre-Initial Operational Testing and Evaluation Jan. 23, 2018, at Eielson Air Force Base, Alaska. In April 2016, Eielson Air Force Base was selected to receive two F-35A squadrons. (U.S. Air Force photo by Airman 1st Class Isaac Johnson)